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SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: MERIDA SPOT REPORT #2: FBI CAFE
EVALUATION VISIT

REF: A. ANDREW/JOHNSON EMAIL 21 SEPTEMBER
[1](#)B. SAN JOSE 772

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. From September 1-3, an FBI fingerprint team evaluated Costa Rica's various fingerprint programs as part of the Merida Initiative's Central American Fingerprint Exchange (CAFE). While noting the diverse levels of sophistication of Costa Rica's fingerprint programs depending on the ministry or organization, the FBI team concluded that Costa Rica had a basic and working, if not up to date and stove-piped, system. The team recognized that Costa Rica's various institutions needed to better coordinate and have better connectivity in order to develop a strong domestic fingerprint program. As a result of this visit, the FBI will provide a request for proposal (RFP) over the next several months via the CAFE program. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) As part of the USG's Merida Initiative in Costa Rica, which includes improving policing/police equipment (reported Ref B) and prison management, the FBI's George Saymon and Michael Pettry as well as our regional LEGAT Paris Johnson visited several Costa Rican law enforcement and civil institutions to kick off the CAFE evaluation:

-- Judicial Police Agency (OIJ), a rough equivalent to the FBI, which in Costa Rica's case falls under the judicial branch.

-- National Civil Registry, the Costa Rican institution that produces a national identification card for every citizen and is part of a semi-autonomous government organization that runs Costa Rica's elections (Supreme Electoral Tribunal-TSE).

-- Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the ministry charged with both domestic and national security as Costa Rica abolished its military in 1948.

-- Ministry of Justice (MOJ), which runs the country's prison systems.

-- Immigration, part of MPS but operates separately from the regular uniformed police.

OIJ

[1](#)3. (SBU) The FBI team found that the OIJ had an older, but still effective Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) in their facilities. Jorge Rojas, the OIJ Director, told us they were planning to upgrade their AFIS soon to be able to hold more fingerprints as well as have an interface

that would link criminal records to fingerprint records. (The AFIS currently has 156,000 records; upgrade would give database up to 300,000). Their new AFIS system would also come with 10 remote locations, he said, but OIJ would prefer to have 25 more terminals to cover their regional stations. The OIJ also maintains a paper back-up system to their AFIS.

¶4. (SBU) Rojas told us that while the regional goal of CAFE was important, it was more important that Costa Rica fully develop and strengthen its domestic fingerprinting system first. He noted that of all of the Costa Rican government entities that use fingerprints for one purpose or another, his organization needed to have better connectivity to the Ministry of Public Security and Immigration. Once those links were solidified and they had a good system in place, Rojas added, Costa Rica would be a better regional fingerprint-sharing partner. FBI team member Saymon agreed that putting a strong, national fingerprint system in place first was important and he added that CAFE should be able to assist in that effort.

¶5. (SBU) On the question of providing easy access to Costa Rica's fingerprint database to the U.S., OIJ Rojas signaled that it would need to be in compliance with the Costa Rican constitution and that, at the least, there would probably need to be a Memorandum of Agreement/Understanding (MOA/MOU) in place in order to do this. He added that Costa Rica would expect reciprocity. Saymon said he would provide a sample MOA/MOU that the USG has done in other countries as a model.

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SECURITY

¶6. (SBU) MPS Vice Minister Marcela Chacon and Deputy Director of Costa Rica's uniformed police Kattia Chavarria provided the FBI team a thorough briefing and tour of MPS's fingerprint facilities. While their fingerprint database is the largest in the country with over 3 million prints, it is in paper files only and not digitized. The FBI team observed how MPS fingerprint technicians analyzed, stored, and filed their fingerprint cards. VM Chacon, in referring to a MOA/MOU between the USG and GOCR (as noted in para 5 above) told us that the MOA could be more of a "Statement of Intent" and that it could fall under the auspices of the Merida Initiative or the 1962 Technical Assistance agreement between the U.S. and Costa Rica.

IMMIGRATION

¶7. (SBU) Mario Zamora, Director of Costa Rican Immigration, told us that his department was slowly upgrading their digitization capabilities to include fingerprinting technologies. He said that of the 4.5 million inhabitants in Costa Rica, approximately 600,000 were foreigners and approximately 250,000-300,000 of them had an "irregular" status. In addition, he said that Costa Rica had more than 2 million tourist visitors each year.

¶8. (SBU) One area that Immigration has made significant progress in is its legal permanent resident (LPR) card program. It uses the same basic card that U.S. LPRs use (and made by the same company that the USG contracts with for LPR cards). Zamora provided us with a tour of his facilities that included how they adjudicate, manufacture, and issue these new cards. They use a two-print system with other biometric information, such as a photo and signature. Zamora said his agency had already issued 135,000 of these new cards at a rate of approximately 10,000 cards a month. They already have plans to upgrade this card with an embedded microchip that will contain personal information as part of their "Digitize Government" program.

¶9. (SBU) Zamora agreed with OIJ Rojas' assessment that better connectivity was needed between Immigration, MPS, and OIJ.

His main challenge, he said, was lack of resources.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

¶10. (SBU) Guillermo Ugalde, Director of the MOJ's Penitentiary Police, and his team provided us with a professional presentation detailing their need to upgrade their current paper fingerprint system to an AFIS-type of system. (Per Ref A, we emailed this presentation to FBI regional attache Paris Johnson). Ugalde said that currently they have 20 trained employees in the "Henry" fingerprint system but would need technological training if they were to get an AFIS system. According to their estimates, to fully digitize their records and to implement AFIS would cost approximately \$859,000.

¶11. (SBU) Ugalde underscored that Costa Rica's prison population was growing in all of their 25 detention centers located around the country, in part due to recently passed security-reform laws including an organized crime law. Fourteen of those centers are "closed" (meaning inmates spend full time in jail) and have roughly 9100 prisoners; 11 of them are "open" centers where 820 prisoners work outside of jail during the day but sleep in jail facilities at night. Finally, they also have what they call a "community" program, somewhat similar to a parole system, with 5025 persons. Ugalde added that some of their prisoners were "high value" and very "visible" due to their connections to the FARC, and their presence was forcing Costa Rica to change/update their prison system.

NATIONAL CIVIL REGISTRY

¶12. (SBU) Marisol Castro, Director General of Costa Rica's National Civil Registry (NCR), appreciated the FBI visit and provided us a tour of their facilities. Although not directly linked to Costa Rica's law enforcement agencies, the

NCR maintains a fingerprint registry using two prints (each index finger preferably) linked to other identifying characteristics of all of Costa Rica's citizens. When necessary, they do cooperate with OIJ and others in official investigations.

NEXT STEPS

¶13. (SBU) During a wrap-up meeting, FBI Saymon provided all of the GOCR organizations that we visited a review of what the FBI's (and others) next steps were to implement CAFE in Costa Rica:

- Create an after action report (AAR) from this visit;
- From this AAR, develop a program proposal that would take into account what fingerprint systems currently exist in Costa Rica, what methods of assistance might be available, and how to best meet the needs of both Costa Rica and the U.S.;
- Once there is a program proposal, it would be cleared through the interagency process, including Post and GOCR;
- Upon mutual agreement, the proposal would go to Department of State for public advertisement for a contract;
- Once the contract has been awarded, then work could begin.

¶14. (SBU) Based on this process, Saymon estimated that work would begin on the project near the end of 2010 or earlier depending on the speed of the contracting process. He clarified that with the current Merida resources dedicated to Costa Rica for CAFE, only the strengthening of its domestic

fingerprint capabilities would be addressed. Additional funding, he said, would be required to integrate CAFE into a regional platform. However, Saymon indicated that the FBI in the short term might be able to provide fingerprint training to Costa Rica.

COMMENT

¶15. (SBU) Every GOCR agency appreciated the FBI fingerprint evaluation visit. OIJ will most likely be the main organization that the FBI will be able to assist, with probable emphasis on being able to help them link into the fingerprint databases of MPS and Immigration. However, MPS's fingerprint system is wholly based on paper, so assisting MPS in digitizing their records would seem to be appropriate. Additionally, the MOJ has a clear plan on the shelf and any assistance that the FBI can provide to it or any of the organizations, even if just sending training teams to demonstrate how to properly take fingerprints will benefit Costa Rica immensely.

¶16. (U) Post appreciates the visit by the FBI evaluation team and looks forward to further cooperation.

¶17. (U) FBI Saymon has cleared this report.
BRENNAN